

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Tensas Parish Courthouse is situated on its own block, at the head of a large well treed rectangular park. The area which encompasses the courthouse and the park is well defined from the surrounding residential neighborhood. The park area is included in the nomination because it has always provided a natural view from the front of the courthouse. The boundaries were drawn to exclude some modern one story service buildings to the rear. These buildings, though out of character with the courthouse, only effect the view of the rear facade.

The courthouse itself is square in plan with diagonally set wings at the corners. The large square courtroom occupies most of the upper floor with offices on the ground floor. The ground floor can be entered on all four sides which yields a Greek Cross plan corridor arrangement.

The courthouse has a brick bearing wall structure with sandstone block facing and sandstone columns. Floors are supported by wooden beams which run between the bearing walls.

Each of the three main facades has an attenuated composite order portico with pressed tin ornamentation in the tympanum. These porticoes alternate with the diagonal corner wings in a visually energetic composition. Each of the corners is decorated with raised coining. The two main floors are surrounded by a pressed tin entablature with an egg and dart cornice. This is surmounted in turn by an English Baroque style cupola resting on a heavy base which is faced with a pressed tin balustrade. At one time the cupola contained a clock with four faces. Although this has been removed it has not had a major impact upon the exterior. Neither has the filling in of two windows on the front facade with sandstone block. The only other exterior change is the addition of a pair of walls at the rear to facilitate deliveries. This, however, does not effect any of the three main facades.

The only noteworthy interior space is the second story courtroom. Although this room has received a new ceiling it still retains all of the original courtroom features including the paneled judge's bench, witness stand and jury box.

SPECIFIC DATES	1906
BUILDER/ARCHITECT	P. H. Weathers

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Tensas Parish Courthouse has significance in the areas of both "Politics/Government" and "Architecture." Since 1906 it has served as the focal point of parish government -- the seat of justice and the meeting place of the Police Jury. The courthouse, in addition, possesses a degree of significance as a fine local example of early twentieth century eclectic architecture. Outstanding architectural features include its English Baroque cupola and also its three porticoes, which are unusually light and finely proportioned considering the period.

In 1905, after a year of discussion, the Tensas Parish Police Jury passed an ordinance providing for the erection of a new courthouse and jail to replace the two-story frame building which had been the parish's original courthouse but was no longer adequate. P. H. Weathers was appointed architect for the new building. Lewman and Company of Louisville, Kentucky put in the lowest bid for construction, and it got the contract. The cost of the courthouse was \$51,137.

The park or parade ground to the front of the building was not landscaped at the time of the original construction. Originally there was a dirt road that led from the levee straight through the parade ground to the courthouse steps. Large elm trees covered the parade ground until the 1930's, when they were all destroyed by disease. Soon afterward, Elliott Coleman replanted the parade ground with live oaks. Today these trees are large and stately, and the central road is gone, making the tract a fine public park .

In the 1930's, an article was published in the Saturday Evening Post concerning the round pedestal table in the lobby of the courthouse. The table is solid oak, supported by a large central leg which has four feet in the "claw and ball" design (see attached drawing). The table was used by the men in the courthouse off ices as a poker table . At first they had only a rickety old table to play on, and they soon decided that they needed a better one. To finance it, they placed the winnings of each game in a special kitty and saved until there was enough to buy the table. The article in the Post included pictures of the men sitting around their table playing poker, an activity which they seem to have engaged in rather frequently since there was not much business transacted at the courthouse during the 1930's.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Brasseaux, Carl A., Glenn R. Conrad, R. Warren Robinson The Courthouses of Louisiana, University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette, La. 1977.

Letter from Suzanne Rush, Tensas Parish Courthouse to State Historic Preservation Office (June 5, 1978) with attachments, located in National Register file for "Tenses Parish Courthouse," State Historic Preservation Office, Baton Rouge.